



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 10
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98101

May 19, 2008

Reply To
Attn Of: ETPA-088

Ref: 07-033-AFS

Kara Chadwick, District Ranger
Palouse Ranger District
1700 Highway 6
Potlatch, ID 83855

Dear Ms. Chadwick:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Corralled Bear Project on the Palouse Ranger District of the Clearwater National Forest in Idaho. We are submitting comments pursuant to our responsibility under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

The DEIS analyzes six alternatives, including a no action alternative. The project proposes activities for the management of vegetation, hazardous fuels, and access, plus watershed improvements and an amendment to the Forest Plan. The project area is 11,320 acres in size, and is north the towns of Deary and Helmer, Idaho.

All of the action alternatives propose to precommercial thin 582 acres, decommission 8.4 miles of road, apply gravel resurfacing to 7.2 miles of erosion-prone road, provide streamside rehabilitation to five sites, designate 5.5 miles of OHV route, restrict OHV use on 10.7 miles of road, and amend the Forest Plan to redesignate Corral Creek and the East Fork Big Bear Creek from "Minimum Viable" to "Low Fish." In addition to these actions, Alternative 3, the preferred alternative, would conduct 534 acres of regeneration harvest, 140 acres of improvement cuts, reconstruct 1.9 miles of road, treat 8.3 miles of roadside to reduce fuel buildup, and prune and underburn 97 acres adjacent to private property to reduce fuel buildup and continuity. The preferred alternative differs from the originally proposed action in that it uses the existing road system and requires no new road construction.

EPA is fully supportive of the management direction proposed under Alternative 3, and we appreciate the proactive approach taken by the Forest Service in addressing road-related impacts to water quality. We are also fully supportive of the proposed access restrictions. Limiting motorized use on erosion-prone native surface roads will help to move water quality impaired waterbodies in the project area, such as Corral Creek and the Potlatch River, toward meeting water quality standards.

We do seek additional clarification with respect to the proposed OHV route designations. It is not clear from the document whether the impacts of adopting the user created routes off of

1927A and constructing the proposed connector trail were analyzed as a part of the Upper Palouse ATV Environmental Assessment. If these additions to the OHV trail system have not been analyzed, we recommend that any potential impacts be examined in the Final EIS. Further, although section VI of the EIS (Recreation and Access p. 129) provides a good written description of the proposed trail modifications, these changes do not appear to be reflected on the map in Appendix E. In order to ensure a clear understanding of the proposed trail system changes, we recommend that Appendix E be updated to reflect OHV trail construction and/or closure.

Based on our review, we are rating the DEIS as LO (Lack of Objections). An explanation of this rating is enclosed. If you have questions or would like to discuss these comments, please contact Teresa Kubo of my staff at (503) 326-2859. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment.

Sincerely,

/s/

Christine B. Reichgott, Manager
NEPA Review Unit